

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-07 INR-07 LAB-04

NSAE-00 SIL-01 DODE-00 PA-01 USIA-06 PRS-01 SP-02

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R 191215Z MAR 75

FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7590

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THE FOLLOWING TELEGRAM SENT ACTION INFO
CALCUTTA BOMBAY FROM OMADRAS ON 18 MAR 75
IS REPEATED FOR YOUR INFO

QUOTE

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PGOV, IN

SUBJECT: END OF VELLORE HOSPITAL STRIKE

REF: MADRAS 330

1. SUMMARY. THE STRIKE AT THE CHRISTIAN MEDICAL COLLEGE
HOSPITAL IN VELLORE OFFICIALLY ENDED WHEN THE STRIKERS RETURNED
TO WORK ON MARCH 17 FOLLOWING A DECLARATION BY TAMIL NADU
CHIEF MINISTER KARUNANIDHI THAT THE GOTN WOULD FIND OTHER JOBS
FOR THE 15 DISMISSED WORKERS WHOM THE HOSPITAL MANAGEMENT
HAD REFUSED TO TAKE BACK. WE HOPE THIS IS THE END OF LABOR
TROUBLES AT THE HOSPITAL , BUT IT PROBABLY ISN'T. A LOT OF
BITTERNESS HAS BEEN CREATED BY THE STRIKE. THE GOTN'S
POLITICALLY MOTIVATED INTERVENTION INFLAMED ANTI-MALAYALEE
AND ANTI-CHRISTIAN FEELINGS WHICH SOME OBSERVERS EXPECT
WILL SOON FLARE UP AGAIN. IN THE COURSE OF THIS
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STRIKE THE GOTN, THE GOI, AND JP NARAYAN HAVE ALL HAD

SOMETHING TO SAY. A BAD PRECEDENT FOR LABOR-MANAGEMENT RELATIONS MAY HAVE BEEN ESTABLISHED WITH THE CHIEF MINISTER'S GUARANTEE OF ALTERNATE EMPLOYMENT TO THE DISMISSED WORKERS. AND KARUNANIDHI'S PRESTIGE, WHICH HE NEEDLESSLY PUT ON THE LINE, HAS SUFFERED IN SPITE OF THE COMPROMISE HE WORKED OUT TO SETTLE THE STRIKE. UNDER INCREASING PRESSURE BOTH FROM KAMARAJ AND M.G. RAMACHANDRAN (MGR), THE CHIEF MINISTER SEEMS TO HAVE BECOME MORE STRIDENT AND PRONE TO DECIDE ISSUES ON A KNEE-JERK REFLEX JUDGEMENT OF WHERE THE MOST VOTES LIE. LONG-RANGE PLANNING AND LEADERSHIP IN THE STATE MUST INEVITABLY SUFFER.

2. THE STRIKE BY WORKERS OF THE CHRISTIAN MEDICAL COLLEGE HOSPITAL, VELLORE, WAS CALLED OFF ON MARCH 15 BY STRIKING WORKERS FOLLOWING AN APPEAL TO THAT EFFECT BY CHIEF MINISTER KARUNANIDHI AND HIS DECLARATION THAT THE GOTN WOULD GUARANTEE ALTERNATE EMPLOYMENT FOR THE 15 DISMISSED WORKERS WHOM THE MANAGEMENT REFUSED TO TAKE BACK. IN A LONG SPEECH MADE IN THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY MARCH 15, IN WHICH KARUNANIDHI ANNOUNCED HIS SETTLEMENT PROPOSAL, THE CHIEF MINISTER REFUTED POINT-BY-POINT CHARGES OF GOVERNMENT-INSPIRED HARASSMENT WHICH THE HOSPITAL MANAGEMENT HAD PUBLISHED IN MADRAS PAPERS THE SAME DAY. DENYING THE GOTN HAD BEEN VINDICTIVE TOWARD THE HOSPITAL, KARUNANIDHI DECLARED THE GOTN WAS "NOT AGAINST THE CHRISTIAN MINORITY." IN SO DOING, OF COURSE, HE ONLY REINFORCED THE POINT THAT THE HOSPITAL IS RUN BY A RELIGIOUS MINORITY. KARUNANIDHI HARPED ON THE THEME THAT THE ONLY MISTAKE HIS GOVERNMENT HAD COMMITTED WAS "GOING TO THE SUCCOR OF THESE HARIJAN WORKERS." HE CRITICIZED THE HOSPITAL MANAGEMENT: "FORGET AND FORGIVE IS THE CARDINAL PRINCIPLE OF CHRISTIANITY.. YET THEY (THE MANAGEMENT) ARE NOT INCLINED TO FORGIVE."

3. AWARE OF THE INTERNATIONAL REPUTATION OF CMC HOYOITAL THE GOI APPARENTLY SENT SEVERAL ENVOYS SOUTH WITH INSTRUCTIONS TO GET KARUNANIDHI TO BACK OFF. FINANCE MINISTER C. SUBRAMANIAM TOLD A PUBLIC MEETING ORGANIZED BY THE TNCC IN MADRAS MARCH 15 THAT "THE HANDLING OF THE STRIKE SITUATION BY THE GOVERNMENT HAS BROUGHT DISCREDIT TO THE STATE." GOI LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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HOME MINISTER K. BRAHMANANDA REDDI TOLD NEWSMEN IN MADRAS THAT HE HAD URGED KARUNANIDHI TO TAKE A "GENEROUS VIEW," AND OUR CONTACTS TELL US HE WAS CONSIDERABLY HARSHER IN PRIVATE. EVEN JP NARAYAN CHIPPED IN WITH A TELEGRAM URGING THE CHIEF MINISTER TO FIND AN "AMICABLE AND EARLY" SETTLEMENT.

4. WE BELIEVE THAT ALL STRIKING UNIONS INVOLVED, INCLUDING

THOSE NOT BELONGING TO THE DMK, PROBABLY WILL SUPPORT THE IMMEDIATE SETTLEMENT. BUT WE ARE LESS CONFIDENT THAT THIS IS THE END OF LABOR TROUBLES AT THE HOSPITAL. TROUBLE AND VIOLENCE HAVE ERUPTED EVERY YEAR SINCE THE UNION WAS STARTED AT THE HOSPITAL IN 1968. THE STRIKE PRODUCED HARD FEELINGS AND EVEN VIOLENCE, AND THE HAM-HANDED INTERVENTION OF THE CHIEF MINISTER RESULTED IN A GOOD DEAL OF BITTERNESS. KARUNANIDHI'S APPEALING TO ANTI-MALAYALEE FEELING DURING THE STRIKE AND THEN SINGLED OUT THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY FOR HAVING BEHAVED "IN AN UN-CHRISTIAN" "WAY" HAVE SURFACED COMMUNAL FRICTIONS WHICH MAY FLARE UP AGAIN. IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN WHETHER GOTN WILL FOLLOW THROUGH ON ITS THREATS TO COLLECT TAXES, COLLECT POLICE PROTECTION FEES, & PULL DOWN THE HOSPITAL COMPOUND WALL.

5. ONE CONCLUSION IS THAT KARUNANIDHI'S HANDLING OF THE CMC HOSPITAL STRIKE MAY HAVE SET SOME PERNICIOUS PRECEDENTS FOR LABOR-MANAGEMENT RELATIONS. THE PRINCIPLE THAT DISMISSED WORKERS WILL BE GUARANTEED ALTERNATIVE EMPLOYMENT BY THE GOVERNMENT COULD BE VERY TROUBLESOME, ALTHOUGH ALL UNION LEADERS WE HAVE TALKED TO REGARD THIS AS A POLITICAL ABERGATION AND NOT A SERIOUS GUIDE TO THEIR OWN FUTURE ACTIONS. DUNNING MANAGEMENT FOR POLICE PROTECTION FROM STRIKERS HAS ALSO OCCURRED BEFORE, BUT NOT IN THE AMOUNTS INVOLVED HERE (RS 585,000). SOME EXECUTIVES ARE WORRIED THAT KARUNANIDHI MAY FEEL COMPELLED TO PROVE HE WAS NOT SINGLING CMC HOSPITAL OUT FOR SPECIAL TREATMENT BY CHARGING THEIR COMPANIES EXORBITANT FEES THE NEXT TIME THE PICKET LINES GO UP OUTSIDE THEIR DOORS. THESE SAME EXECUTIVES, ON THE OTHER HAND, HAVE TAKEN HEART FROM THE APPARENT SUCCESS OF THE FIRM STAND ON PRINCIPLE TAKEN BY THE CMC HOSPITAL MANAGEMENT.

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6. BUT THE MOST SERIOUS ASPECT OF THE CMC HOSPITAL AFFAIR IS THE NOTABLY BAD JUDGEMENT CHIEF MINISTER KARUNANIDHI EXERCISED. HE SEEMS TO HAVE GIVEN NO CONSIDERATION TO THE INTERNATIONAL REPUTATION OF THE CMC HOSPITAL OR TO THE DESIRABILITY OF THE MAINTAINING HIGH STANDARDS IN MATTERS INVOLVING HEALTH AND LIFE, BUT TREATED THE STRIKE LIKE A DISPUTE IN A SMALL FACTORY THAT HE COULD QUASH WITH A WAVE OF HIS HAND, MEANWHILE SCORING SOME POLITICAL POINTS WITH THE MASSES AT THE EXPENSE OF MALAYALEES AND MANAGEMENT. COPING WITH DROUGHT, FOOD SHORTAGES, AND HIGH PRICES, KARUNANIDHI HAS BEEN TAKING A LOT OF FLAK LATELY FROM THE ADMK AND KAMARAJ. HE HAS ALSO MOST RECENTLY BEEN CRITICIZED SHARPLY BY HIS SOUTHERN BROTHER GONE OVER THE UNION FORCES, FINANCE

MINISTER SUBRAMANIAM. UNDER THIS PRESSURE, HE HAS
BEEN TURNING SNAPPISH AND SEEMS TO VIEW THINGS
FROM AN INCREASINGLY PAROCHIAL POPULIST PERSPECTIVE.
IF THIS CONTINUES, LEADERSHIP ON THE LONG RANGE
PROBLEMS OF THE STATE WILL INEVITABLY SUFFER.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: HOSPITALS, LABOR STRIKES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 19 MAR 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: CunninFX
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975NEWDE03786
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750096-0766
From: NEW DELHI
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750336/aaaabgod.tel
Line Count: 175
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 75 MADRAS 330
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: CunninFX
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 04 AUG 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <04 AUG 2003 by ShawDG>; APPROVED <24 NOV 2003 by CunninFX>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
05 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: END OF VELLORE HOSPITAL STRIKE
TAGS: PGOV, IN, (NADU, TAMIL)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006